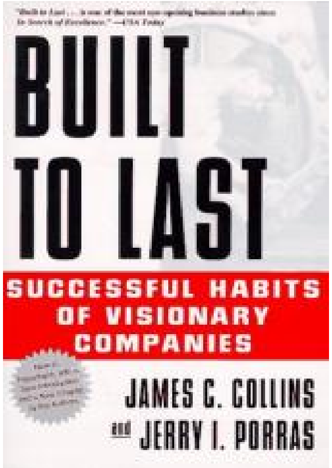
Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies

by Jerry I. Porras and James C. Collins



About the Book

What distinguishes a successful company from the kind of company whose very name becomes a cultural icon, whose place is fixed in the public consciousness? An innovative and inspiring study of the culture and longevity of some of America's most successful organizations, **Built to Last** is a blueprint for building organizations that will endure long into the twenty-first century.

In **Built to Last**, James C. Collins and Jerry I. Porras identify the unique characteristics of visionary companies and show how any business can cultivate them. From Merck to Philip Morris, from General Electric to Nordstrom, from Ford to Sony, visionary companies display an amazing resilience and an unshakable commitment to their core ideology that allows them to surpass even their more temporarily successful competitors and achieve a lasting place in the cultural landscape.

By examining the founding and history of these companies, the ways in which they have handled both adversity and success, and their continued commitment to their corporate identity, Collins and Porras reveal the unique characteristics of these visionary companies and show what actions other companies may take to achieve the same level of long-lasting performance.

Discussion Guide

1. Why do you think the authors chose to use the term "visionary" to describe the companies profiled in the book rather than "successful" or "great"?

2. The authors state that "as extraordinary as they are, the visionary companies do not have perfect, unblemished records" and then cite specific examples: Walt Disney faced a serious cash flow crisis in 1939 which forced it to go public. Boeing had serious difficulties in the mid-1930s, the late 1940s, and again in the 1970s when it laid off over sixty thousand employees. What allowed these two and the other visionary companies to bounce back from severe adversity?

3. Myth number one debunked in the book is that "it takes a great idea to start a great company." Do you agree that this is a myth? Cite some examples of visionary companies that did not start with a great idea. Discuss the other myths that the authors "shatter."

4. The authors quote Bill Hewlett of Hewlett-Packard as saying, "When I talk to business schools occasionally, the professor of management is devastated when I say that we didn't have any plans when we started-we were just opportunistic. We did anything that would bring in a nickel." Why do you think this is a disconcerting notion to many people, in this particular case to management professors? What is that they want to hear?

5. Which of the visionary companies do you think is the most successful, and why? How do its business practices differ from its "comparison" company?

6. The authors believe their findings "will apply more in the twenty-first century than in the twentieth. In particular, the essential ideas to come from our work?will continue to be key concepts long into the future." Do you agree that their findings will endure well into the future? Are any of the "visionary" companies, in your opinion, not as successful today as they were when the authors first wrote about them in 1995?

Author Bio

Jerry I. Porras is the Lane Professor of Organizational Behavior and Change, Emeritus, at the Stanford University Graduate School of Business where he has served as associate dean for academic affairs and as the director of several executive programs on organizational change.

Critical Praise

"A 'must read' for any CEO who aspires to create a great company."

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